

The background of the cover is a photograph of a group of people, including an older man in a flat cap and vest, and several younger people, playing football in a park with autumn foliage. The title 'Veterans' Health' is prominently displayed at the top. The word 'Veterans'' is in red, and 'Health' is in light blue. To the left of the title, there is a graphic of the American flag's stripes.

# Veterans' Health

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE  
FOR OHIO VETERANS

FALL • 2003

Better health  
is at your  
fingertips

Get vaccinated

Lowering  
your blood  
pressure

VA Healthcare  
System of Ohio





## To our readers

Welcome to our fall issue of *Veterans' Health*. We are pleased to present a variety of topics this season aimed at keeping you on the track to better health.

As we enjoy the brisk air and colorful foliage, we need to remember that the winter months are just around the corner, and with them come seasonal illnesses like the flu. This year, defend yourself against the flu by taking measures now. Turn to page 3 for details on better protecting yourself by getting vaccinated in October or November.

Shorter days can trigger or worsen depression for many people. Fortunately, depression can be treated successfully. See our article on page 3 to better understand the symptoms of depression and how to get help for you or someone you love.

We are proud to offer a two-page spread on pages 4–5 of this issue devoted to our latest effort to care for your healthcare needs—our *Healthwise® for Life* handbook. Last issue, we introduced you to this handy resource that provides important health information. Beginning October 1, you'll have this helpful guide in your hands. We tell you how to use it to research symptoms, get preventive advice, help you decide when you need to see a doctor and more. Taking charge of your health requires that you be an active participant in your healthcare, and *Healthwise for Life* gives you the tools you need to do so.

Keeping yourself well means caring for your heart health. We devote page 6 to important cardiac issues such as recognizing heart attack symptoms—particularly important for women since symptoms differ and often go unrecognized. We also offer preventive advice on lowering your blood pressure and avoiding a second heart attack.

Finally, to continue our prevention theme, on page 7 we encourage you to enroll with VA for an evaluation, an opportunity not all service-connected veterans are taking. See this page for details on how to use VA to better serve your healthcare needs.

We hope you find this issue interesting and informative. Have a healthy, enjoyable fall season!

—Clyde Parkis, Network Director



### About our mailing list

We make every effort to ensure our mailing lists are accurate. If you have questions or would like to be added to or deleted from the list, let us know. To help serve you better, we need to know your entire address. If you receive *Veterans' Health*, the easiest way is to clip the mailing panel and send it to us at:

*Veterans' Health*  
VA Healthcare System of Ohio  
Network Office  
11500 Northlake Drive, Suite 200  
Cincinnati, OH 45249

*Veterans' Health* is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 22 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

#### The Mission of VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

### *Veterans' Health* Editorial Directors

**Suzanne Tate**  
Cincinnati VA Campus

**Debbie Crabtree**  
Chillicothe VA Campus

**Debbie Page**  
VA Healthcare System of Ohio



# Get vaccinated

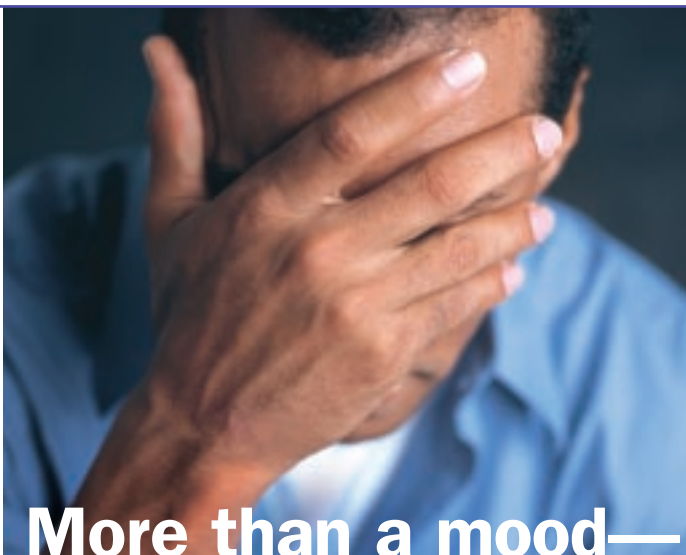
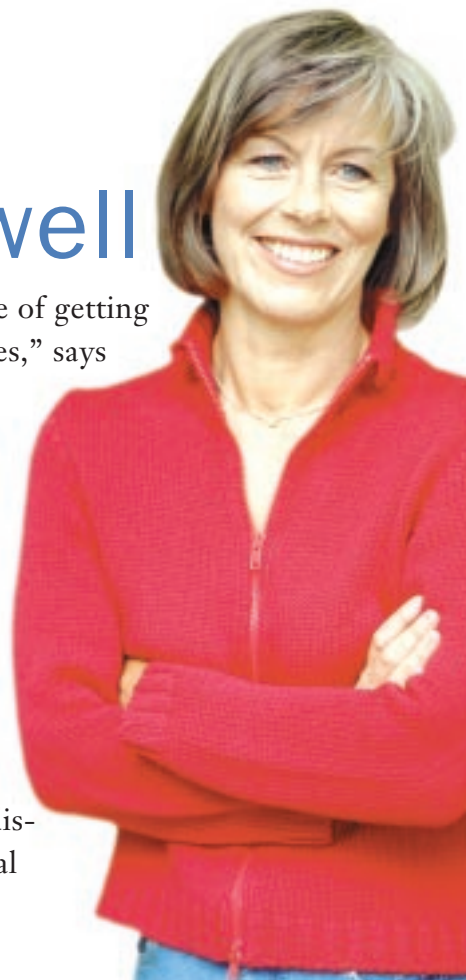
## It's key to staying well

If you've ever had the flu, you probably never want to get it again. Luckily, you can prevent those terrible aches and fevers by getting a free annual flu shot. October and November are the best months to come in for one.

"They're available in December and January, but you want to get one as early as possible," says Teresa Davis, R.N., B.S.N., CIC, infection control nurse at Chillicothe VA. "If you don't get one, it's kind of like walking through a minefield. You could hit a hidden time bomb and get quite ill."

You can also prevent pneumonia, another common illness, through vaccination. "After

age 54, your chance of getting pneumonia increases," says Davis, adding that in most cases it's a one-time vaccine that can be taken anytime during the year. "We have a drug-resistant type of pneumonia in the U.S., so you really want to try to prevent the disease rather than deal with getting it." **VH**



## More than a mood— The facts about depression

Contrary to what many people believe, depression is not a natural consequence of growing old or a sign of personal weakness. Rather, depression is a medical illness—and a highly treatable one.

Although symptoms vary, the most common one is loss of interest in normal activities. This leads to feelings of emptiness, apathy and withdrawal. A person may be unable to concentrate, have problems sleeping, lose his or her appetite or have other physical complaints.

A thorough evaluation by a doctor is the first step in diagnosing depression. It's essential because depression can be a complication of another medical problem. Your doctor may treat your depression or refer you to a psychiatrist.

If depression is diagnosed, treatment can relieve symptoms in most cases. Standard treatments for depression include psychotherapy, antidepressant medication or a combination of both.

If you're experiencing symptoms of depression, see your doctor or call the hospital for a referral. Remember: Most people with depression recover, and prompt treatment speeds the healing process. **VH**

# Better health is at

**W**hen it comes to health information, you need a source you can trust. Beginning October 1, *Healthwise® for Life* will be our special gift to you. It's part of our ongoing effort to provide you with the best healthcare possible.

This new handbook covers common questions and conditions and helps you make smart

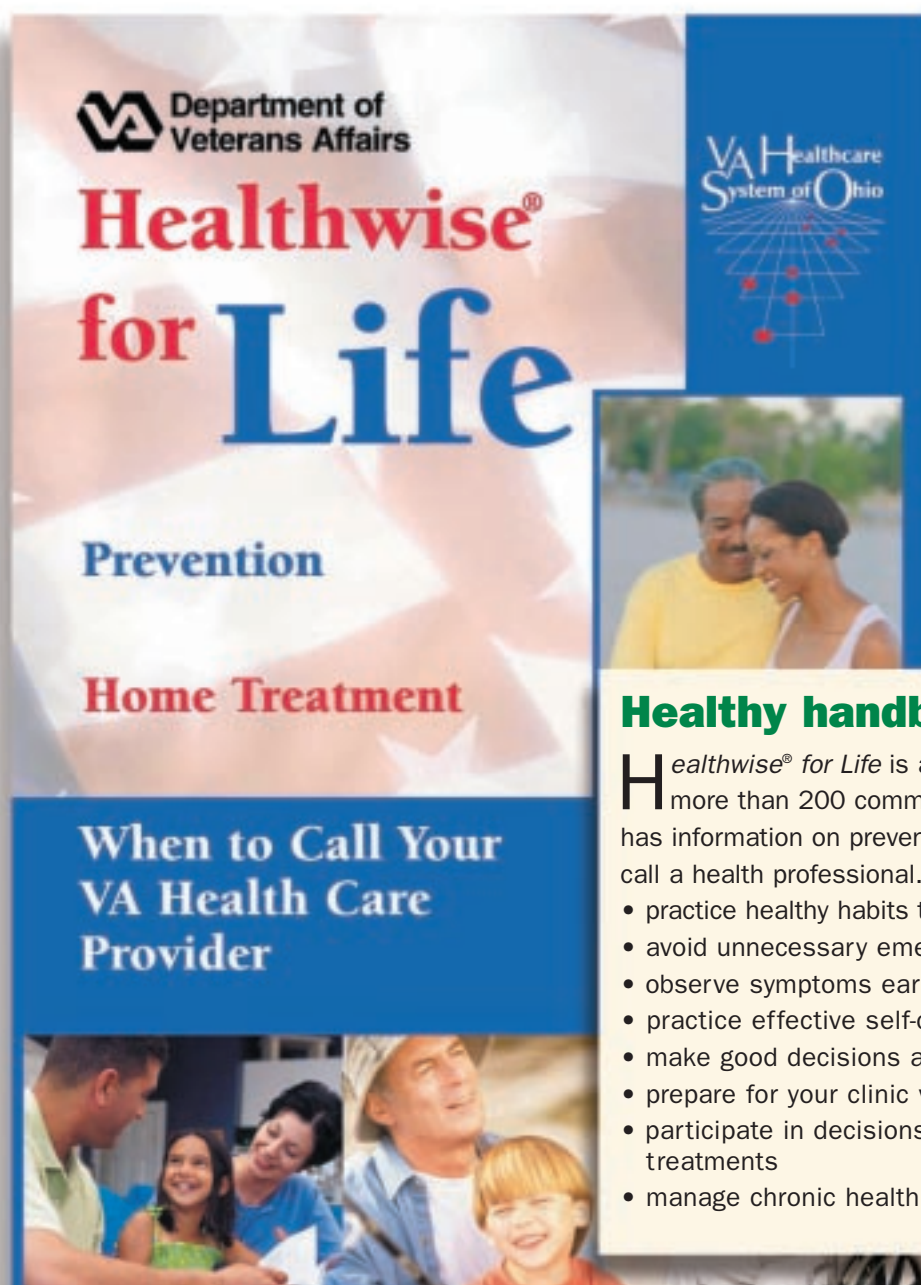
decisions about prevention, home treatments and when to call a provider rather than make a trip to the hospital. It also offers helpful tips on nutrition, stress reduction, first aid and exercise.

*Healthwise for Life* helps you familiarize yourself with important health information before you have a medical problem. If you become sick, knowing what's in the handbook

can help you decide quickly on the most appropriate care for you or your loved ones.

During life-threatening medical emergencies, you should always call 911. But for other medical problems, pick up your handbook and:

- **Look in the table of contents** or the alphabetical index for your symptoms or problems.
- **Locate these symptoms or problems** and turn to the corresponding page(s).



## Healthy handbook at a glance

**H**ealthwise® for Life is an easy-to-use resource that covers more than 200 common health problems. Each section has information on prevention, home treatment and when to call a health professional. The handbook also can help you:

- practice healthy habits to prevent illness
- avoid unnecessary emergency room/clinic visits
- observe symptoms early on and take action
- practice effective self-care at home
- make good decisions about when to seek care
- prepare for your clinic visit
- participate in decisions about tests, medications and treatments
- manage chronic health problems better

# your fingertips

- **Follow the instructions provided.**

For example, if you suspect that you have heat exhaustion—which can lead to heatstroke—and you don't know if you should go to the hospital or not, refer to the handbook. The handbook tells you that if your temperature reaches above 102° or if you note a change in mental status, call 911. Otherwise, stop your activity, get out of the sun and remove unnecessary clothing. Apply cool water to your body, and lie down if you feel dizzy. This kind of advice will help you care for your health while avoiding an unnecessary trip to the emergency room.

When you do have to see your doctor, “the book is a tool to help you prepare for a visit,” says Debbie Crabtree, R.N., patient education coordinator, VA Healthcare System of Ohio, Chillicothe Medical Center. “It offers sample questions to ask providers, such as, ‘What is my diagnosis? What is wrong? What is the treatment? Are there any alternatives?’”

If you have questions about the advice given in *Healthwise for Life* or if you need further assistance, call the Tele-Nurse program at **1-888-838-6446**. A registered nurse will take your call seven days a week, 24 hours a day. When you phone you'll need to give your Social Security number, so keep it handy, along with paper and a pencil to write down the information discussed. Also prepare a list of your most serious symptoms or problems. Answering the questions on pages 1 and 2 in front of the handbook can also help.

Next time you go to the clinic to visit your primary care physician, don't leave without this new resource that can help you take charge of your wellness. “It's a tool to empower vet-

erans,” Crabtree says, noting that it's our gift to all veterans enrolled in primary care. “No book can replace the need for healthcare providers, but this resource can help you and your healthcare provider work together to manage your individual needs.”

*Healthwise* also offers an online resource. Accredited and approved by medical experts, this user-friendly tool features the most current health information and services. For further health resources, visit [www.va.gov/visn10/](http://www.va.gov/visn10/). **VH**





# Lowering your blood pressure

Do you meet the new standard?

**Y**our risk of joining the 50 million Americans with high blood pressure, or hypertension, just increased. The National Institutes of Health issued new guidelines stating your blood pressure shouldn't be higher than 120/80 mm Hg—well below the old standard of 140/90. And if your pressure is 120–139/80–89 mm Hg, you'd better pay attention because you fall into the new prehypertension group.

Luckily, if you have prehypertension, you can do something about it. Lifestyle changes such as losing excess weight, exercising, quitting smoking and limiting alcohol, salt and sodium can help you lower your pressure and avoid medication. Following the DASH eating plan—which is low in saturated fat, cholesterol, red meat and sugar and high in fruits, vegetables, low-fat dairy foods, whole-grain products, fish, poultry and nuts—can help as well.

Working with your physician to develop blood pressure goals and a treatment plan also is key. If you do need medication, new and simplified drugs can help you get your pressure under control and stay well. **VH**



## On the road to recovery

**O**ne million Americans survive heart attacks each year. If you're one of them, you can take steps to assure your safe and speedy recovery.

The first week or so after discharge from the hospital, you'll need to recuperate. Rely on friends and family for help with day-to-day chores and for emotional support. Try to resist feelings of depression. Instead, get dressed each day and avoid watching too much television or isolating yourself.

When your doctor says it's okay, begin an exercise program. Exercise can help reverse heart disease, increase your stamina and decrease cardiac symptoms. Your cardiologist or exercise physiologist can help you determine a safe activity level.

Always take your medications as prescribed. See your doctor regularly and discuss any side effects or symptoms. To avoid a second heart attack, take preventive measures such as improving your diet, maintaining a healthy weight and quitting smoking. **VH**



## Is it a heart attack?

**G**etting immediate medical attention is the key to surviving a heart attack. If you are experiencing any

of these symptoms for more than a few minutes, call 911.

**The most common warning signs of heart attack include:**

- ♥ uncomfortable pressure, squeezing or pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a

few minutes or goes away and comes back

- ♥ pain that spreads to the shoulders, neck or arms

- ♥ chest discomfort with light-headedness, fainting, sweating, nausea or shortness of breath

**Women may also have these less common signs:**

- ♥ atypical chest pain, stomach or abdominal pain

- ♥ unexplained anxiety, weakness or fatigue

- ♥ palpitations, cold sweats or paleness

# Simple ways to maximize your VA care

**I**f you're a service-connected veteran receiving care for a service-related disability, chances are you're already getting great benefits from VA. However, for just a few dollars and a couple of hours of your time, you can get a lot more and find peace of mind, too.

"We want to tell service-connected veterans how to take advantage of more benefits," says David Van Winkle, Ph.D., manager of VAMC Dayton Rehabilitation Care Line and director of VISN 10 Rehabilitation Care Line. "It's to both their and VA's advantages."

## Get tested

According to VA regulations, service-connected veterans who get VA care only for their service-connected disabilities don't have to be enrolled in the VA system, have their medical insurance company billed or pay co-payments. However, some veterans are missing out since every veteran should receive a preventive care (or vesting) evaluation of his or her overall health every three years.

"These evaluations provide valuable information about veterans' health that we might need in an emergency. They can also identify illnesses early on so we can treat them before they become serious," says Dr. Van Winkle. He also points out that vesting exams help VA Healthcare System of Ohio receive more funding from the national VA budget so that all eligible veterans continue to receive quality healthcare.

## Improved rehab services help patients

To better care for disabled veterans, VA Healthcare System of Ohio is also offering new services in the rehabilitation department. They include functional-capacity evaluations



for those with musculoskeletal injuries or disease, a focus on spinal cord injury victims, state-of-the-art digital hearing aids and tele-rehabilitation. "With telerehabilitation, therapy assistants in outpatient clinics use videoconferencing to talk to and receive instructions from physicians or therapists at the main facility who see the patients," says Dr. Van Winkle. "This way, injured patients don't have to drive all the way to the main facility to get therapy." **VH**

# Reaching Us Is Easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

## MEDICAL CENTERS

### Brecksville VA Campus

10000 Brecksville Road  
Brecksville, OH 44141  
440-526-3030

### Chillicothe VA Campus

17273 State Route 104  
Chillicothe, OH 45601  
740-773-1141

### Cincinnati VA Campus

3200 Vine Street  
Cincinnati, OH 45220  
513-861-3100

### Dayton VA Campus

4100 West Third Street  
Dayton, OH 45428  
937-268-6511

### Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue  
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075  
859-572-6202

### Louis Stokes VA Campus

10701 East Boulevard  
Cleveland, OH 44106  
216-791-3800

## INDEPENDENT OUTPATIENT CLINIC

### Chalmers P. Wylie VA Campus

543 Taylor Avenue  
Columbus, OH 43203  
614-257-5200

## COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS

### Akron VA Campus

55 West Waterloo  
Akron, OH 44319  
330-724-7715

### Athens VA Campus

510 West Union Street  
Athens, OH 45701  
740-593-7314

### Bellevue VA Campus

103 Landmark Drive  
Bellevue, KY 41073  
859-392-3840

### Canton VA Campus

733 Market Avenue South  
Canton, OH 44702  
330-489-4600

### Clermont County VA Campus

Eastgate Professional  
Office Park  
4355 Ferguson Drive, Suite 270  
Cincinnati, OH 45245  
513-943-3680

### Dearborn Co. VA Campus

710 W. Eads Parkway  
Lawrenceburg, IN 47025  
812-539-2313

### East Liverpool VA Campus

332 West 6th Street  
East Liverpool, OH 43920  
330-386-4303

### Grove City VA Campus

1953 Ohio Avenue  
Grove City, OH 43123  
614-257-5800

### Lancaster VA Campus

1550 Sheridan Drive, Suite 100  
Colonnade Medical Building  
Lancaster, OH 43130  
740-653-6145

### Lima VA Campus

1303 Bellefontaine Avenue  
Lima, OH 45804  
419-222-5788

### Lorain VA Campus

205 West 20th Street  
Lorain, OH 44052  
440-244-3833

### Mansfield VA Campus

1456 Park Avenue West  
Mansfield, OH 44906  
419-529-4602

### Marietta VA Campus

418 Colegate Drive  
Marietta, OH 45750  
740-568-0412

### McCafferty VA Campus

4242 Lorain Avenue  
Cleveland, OH 44113  
216-939-0699

### Middletown VA Campus

675 North University Boulevard  
Middletown, OH 45042  
513-423-8387

### Painesville VA Campus

7 West Jackson Street  
Painesville, OH 44077  
440-357-6740

### Portsmouth VA Campus

621 Broadway Street  
Portsmouth, OH 45662  
740-353-3236

### Richmond VA Campus

4351 South A Street  
Richmond, IN 47374  
765-973-6915

### Sandusky VA Campus

3416 Columbus Avenue  
Sandusky, OH 44870  
419-625-7350

### Springfield VA Campus

512 South Burnett Road  
Springfield, OH 45505  
937-328-3385

### Warren VA Campus

Riverside Square  
1400 Tod Avenue NW  
Warren, OH 44485  
330-392-0311

### Youngstown VA Campus

2031 Belmont Avenue  
Youngstown, OH 44505  
330-740-9200

### Zanesville VA Campus

840 Bethesda Drive  
Building 3A  
Zanesville, OH 43701  
740-453-7725

Call Tele-Nurse at 1-888-838-6446. • Visit us online at [www.va.gov/visn10/](http://www.va.gov/visn10/).

VA Healthcare System of Ohio Network Office  
11500 Northlake Drive, Suite 200  
Cincinnati, OH 45249



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